

The Shifter

By Janice Hardy

The Shifter is the first in a young adult fantasy series called The Healing Wars about Healers who can draw pain from injured and dying patients and push it into an enchanted metal called pynvium. That charged pynvium in return is used as weapons when the pain is released. Nya has the ability to draw pain from people. However, she is not a Healer because she cannot push it into pynvium. Instead, she is a Shifter with the ability to shift pain from one person to another. She must hide and keep it a secret so that no one could use her as a weapon. Yet, when her younger sister, a Healer in the League, goes missing, Nya finds herself in moral quicksand. In order to find Tali, she must sell her shifting ability to a greedy pain merchant. The choice is made even darker when she discovers that shifted pain can kill over time. Nya must find the right balance between her abilities and her principles as she discovers the link between the pain merchant, the League and the dangerous experiments being performed on the Healers there. I found this to be one of the most unique fantasy series that I have read in a long while. Hardy's take on how healing can be dangerous spins a fun and exciting tale that was hard to put down. In addition, the political turmoil illustrated in the book, gives the book great tension that can't help but pull you in. High school students and some advanced junior high students would definitely enjoy this. Teachers could also use this series to discuss moral issues, ethics, and decision making.

-Valerie Knight, WSC Library

Mister Seahorse

By Eric Carle

This is the very interesting story of a DADDY seahorse who incubates his eggs until they hatch—making seahorses viviparous but in a slightly different way. Along the way, Mr. Seahorse meets other Daddies that are caring for young as well. And as all good daddies do, Mr. Seahorse works himself out of a job by the end. The colors and text make this a perfect book for preschool and early elementary kids. With the board book format, the illustrations are a little smaller but even little ones will love this book...and not tear it apart. This is great for any collection, including a personal one.

Heather Reid, Home school parent, Omaha, NE

Dolphins on the Sand

By Jim Arnosky

This is the story of a pod of dolphins that beach themselves for a little rest but end up marooned on a sandbar. They are rescued by some creature loving humans and though it's a close call, they make it back to the ocean and even past predators. This is a great book with beautiful illustrations and a text that will educate children in another of the many marine conservation efforts. This book is recommended for any library collection and children of all ages.

Heather Reid, Home school parent, Omaha, NE

Blue Fire

By Janice Hardy

Blue Fire is the second book in the young adult fantasy series, The Healing Wars. The tale continues as Nya and her friends work to smuggle Healers and other pain Takers out of the city before they are “recruited” to help the Duke. Nya and her friends are captured and sent to Baseer, the Duke’s seat of power. Nya is able to escape and rescue her non-Healer friends from jail before they are hanged. However, all of her Healer/Taker friends and her sister, Tali, are still captive. While the Duke sends trackers to try to find Nya, she works with the Baseer underground to try to rescue Tali and steal pynvium, the metal needed for Healers to heal, from the Duke’s Citadel. However, when the attempt is made, Tali is not there. Then, the Duke’s trackers finally capture Nya. Nya must figure out a way to keep the Duke from warping her special powers and using her as a weapon against everyone she loves. This second book in the series was as good as the first. The fast paced action makes it hard to put down as you cheer for Nya and boo her enemies. You can’t wait to see what other special abilities Nya has yet to discover about herself as she makes her way through political intrigue and dangerous situations in a place far from home. I’m looking forward to the next book in the series as would many high school students and advanced junior high students. There is always a surprise around the corner in this book that has you eager for more.

-Valerie Knight, WSC Library

I Can Help

By David Hyde Costello

This is a great book for preschoolers who are learning all about the jungle animals and need a lesson in learning how to be available to help. This is the story of a little duckling who is lost and helped by his friends along the way...he returns the favor and the adventure is ready to begin again. Sweet illustrations and very simple text make this a keeper for any young children’s collection.

Heather Reid, Home school parent, Omaha, NE

Nightshade

By Andrea Cremer

An enthralling love story between young adults that part human and werewolf form. These young adults are sanctioned by their older generation to be united to form a new pack to protect their “world” from the evils that threaten them. Only these young adults have dissimilar views of what they want and their loyalty and duties are in jeopardy. Reading level is 9th – 12th grade. The pages of this book are rough textured on the edges, making it feel like an older book. The story is comparable to Maggie Stiefvater’s series Linger and Shiver. I could not put this book down – I had to keep reading until I finished it. It grabs the reader!

Kristy Wittler

The Elephant's Tale: Legend of the Animal Healer

By Lauren St. John

After the death of her parents, Martine moves to a game reserve with her grandmother and while there learns she has a mystical connection with animals. Her idyllic life comes crashing to a stop when a stranger appears claiming he owns the reserve, including her white giraffe Jemmy, and that they must vacate the premises by Christmas. Martine and her best friend Ben stow away on a plane to Namibia hoping to find a way to save the reserve and their beloved animals. They meet Gift who becomes part of their plan to save the reserve. One of the elephants on the reserve, the disappearance of Gift's father and the disappearance of twenty elephants in Namibia hold the clues to saving their home. This book is recommended for Middle School readers and any library collection. This was the conclusion to the Legend of the Animal Healer series. I have not read any of the other books in the series but after reading this book I want to. This is a great adventure for middle school students that I would recommend.

Deb Daehnke

Rival

By Sara Bennett Wealer

It's not easy being rich, popular, and talented. It's not easy being poor, invisible, and talented. That's what Brooke and Katheryn find out as their friendship blooms, fails, and then grows again. Two girls with different backgrounds share a common bond – music – but can music alone hold their friendship together when there are rivals, boys, and parents pulling them apart? Reading Level is 5th – 8th grade. This book would help young teenagers explore the various dynamics that they will experience in Junior High and High School. It provides a lot of "food for thought" and may equip them with decision making skills for those teen years.

LeNell Quinn, Winside Public School

Django World's Greatest Jazz Guitarist

By Bonnie Christiansen

Django is the story of a "gypsy" or Roma Jazz guitarist. Django is born at the turn of the 20th century and has music infused into his being by the very nature of the gypsy lifestyle. He travels to Paris during a time when American Jazz is extremely popular, and despite an accident, he perseveres to become an icon of the era. Even though the reading level is 2nd to 3rd grade, I believe this book could have the greatest impact by directed teaching, 7th – 10th grade in an Art Resource/Music Library. This book features many glorious and vibrant illustrations that catch the reader's eye. I appreciate the notes and the suggested Discography. I think this book would be a wonderful teaching tool in the music or art classroom.

LeNell Quinn, Winside Public School

Neptune's Children

By Bonnie Dobkin

Josh, his parents, older sister and younger sister Madeline go to Isles of Wonder theme park to celebrate Maddy's cancer remission. While in the park, a viral plague is unleashed. It strikes quickly, mutating rapidly. But the engineers of the plague underestimated its power as it spreads around the world striking down every adult, leaving only children alive. The park consists of five theme-related islands with the central island of Atlantis housing the Neptune Theater. After the initial panic and despair, Milo, a fourteen-year old survivor, is in the theater and uses the voice of King Neptune to rally the surviving children. Milo's Core group of survivors slowly assigns tasks and organizes their new world. Initially Josh is part of the Core but when they do not welcome Zoe as part of their group, Josh, gradually has less and less to do with them. Children begin to cluster into different social groups around the islands of the theme park. Some of these groups like the Core are viewed as elite, while others such as the Ghoulies are feared or even reviled. While the initial organization by the Core is necessary and life-saving, it gradually evolves into something more sinister and Josh, Zoe and a surprise group of children surface to help protect the others. This book is recommended for upper Middle School readers and any library collection. I really enjoyed this book. There was adventure, intrigue and suspense and I think both boys and girls would find it fun to read. It was refreshing how the children took charge of their situation, organized and thought out the details of how they would survive. The author slowly wove in how the different groups of children evolved in their new society and how appearances or perceptions of other children colored what others thought of them. To me it seemed a very quiet commentary on how our society operates. One group, the Ghoulies, was made up of children who were considered outcasts, both in the old society and the new one that evolved after the plague. But in the end, it is these outcasts that help Josh and Zoe expose the Core group and their dangerous plan. There are several very subtle references regarding sexual relations between some of the children, since the characters in the story are 14 or under, this might be offensive to some parents.

Deb Daehnke

Clover Twig and the Magical Cottage

By Kaye Umansky

Clover Twig goes to work for Mrs. Eckles, the local witch, and gets right to work cleaning. She soon learns that she is not only cleaning up after Mrs. Eckles, but also Wilf. Wilf Delivers the groceries and is prone to accidents. When Mrs. Eckles' sister Mesmeranza attempts to take the cottage as her own, Clover, Wilf, and Neville, Mrs. Eckles' cat, are left to defend it. Reading level is 3rd grade and up. This is a fun story of magic that young readers will certainly enjoy.

Diane Limoges

How to Make a Bird

By Marine Murry

It's 5 A.M. and Mannie is leaving her unhappy county life. She is determined to brush off the bad home life for something better. The problem is, memories keep calling her home. Now she must decide if she wants to continue forward with idea to start a new life for herself, or go back home and make the best of a difficult situation. Reading level is 9th grade and up. The premise of the story is good, although the writing is draggy. There must be someone who will enjoy this book though I'm not sure who and/or why. Search for a better written book to get the storyline across.

Diane Limoges

The Wager

By Dona Jo Napoli

19-year-old Don Giovanni goes from being a rich man to having nothing, due to an earthquake followed by tsunamis that strips him of his wealth. When a handsome gentleman offers him unlimited wealth, Don Giovanni cannot resist the opportunity. How hard can it be to not bathe or change his clothes for three years, three months, and three days? To fail would mean the loss of his soul. At first this seems like a simple task, but Don soon learns that cleanliness truly is more important than wealth. Can he resist the unseemly temptations the Devil puts in his path? Reading level is 9th grade and up. This is a well-written story based on an old Sicilian fairytale, "Don Giovanni De La Fortuna". Even if you are not big into fairytales, I think you will find this a very good read.

Diane Limoges

Saraswati's Way

By Monika Schroder

Akash loses both of his parents and his grandmother sends him to break rocks to pay for the family's debt. Akash has no money, no extra clothes, and no one to help him; but he has a talent for Math and a burning desire to attend school. He learns to live on his own, finds a new street family, and learns to work for his dream. Reading level is 5th grade and up. This book is a great multicultural resource and points children towards setting goals, being true to oneself, and making positive choices. This is an excellent tool to show the importance of a good education. The author gives us a taste of what it is like to be poor in India. Unless we walk a mile in our neighbor's shoes...Akash is real and unbelievable! LeNell Quinn, Winside Public School

Otis

By Loren Long

This is a board book with smaller illustrations, but the same story as the original. Otis is replaced by a newer model tractor and is down and out for a bit until he comes to the rescue of a friend and finds his place again. Little boys will love this book and it's a great addition to any library collection.

Heather Reid, Home school parent, Omaha, NE